WORLD CHRONICLE

UNITED NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DURATION: 28' 00" TRANSCRIPT AS BROADCAST

PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Giandomenico Picco, Director and Assistant to the U.N. Secretary-General for Special Assignments

JOURNALISTS: Paul Lewis, The New York Times
Anthony Goodman, Reuters
Walter Pfaeffle, Kuwait News Agency

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

Role of the U.N. Secretary-General in Mediating International Disputes

Giandomenico Picco, Director and Assistant to the United Nations Secretary-General for Special Assignments, discusses the role of the Secretary-General as an impartial mediator of international disputes. He indicates that the Secretary-General can conduct preventative diplomacy more effectively if there were regional political offices at his disposal.

"WORLD CHRONICLE" is produced by the Information Products Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, N.Y. 10017, USA.

Executive Producer: Yuanchi Chen
Director: Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant: Diane Barkley

Programme No. 395 Recorded on 24 May 1990

VOICE From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is World Chronicle, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's World Chronicle.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is WORLD CHRONICLE.

In the last two years there's been a pronounced change in the attitude of major powers toward the United Nations. They call for a strengthening of its authority and an expanded role for the Organization in all areas. How has this new interest in the U.N. affected the work of the Secretary-General? Has the U.N. really become something close to what its founders envisaged?

Our guest today, Giandomenico Picco of Italy, is Director and Assistant to the Secretary-General for Special Assignments. Since 1982 Mr. Picco has been a close associate of the Secretary-General in his efforts to maintain international peace and security. Mr. Picco will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Paul Lewis of The New York Times; Anthony Goodman of Reuters; and Walter Pfaeffle of the Kuwait News Agency.

For some background information, here's a report from our correspondent, Steve Whitehouse.

WHITEHOUSE: It's been called the most impossible job in the world. Its responsibilities include dealing with the most intractable international disputes, but its powers are very limited or ill-defined. The Secretary-General's patient work of quiet diplomacy, which seldom makes headlines does produce results, however.

In April 1988, for example, after a decade of war in Afghanistan and years of U.N. negotiation, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States, finally met in Geneva for the signing ceremony of the Afghanistan Accord. And in the same year ...

PEREZ DE CUELLAR: "I now call upon the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq to observe a ceasefire and to discontinue all military action on land, at sea and in the air as of 0300 GMT on 20 August 1988."

WHITEHOUSE: Then in 1989. At the request of five Central American countries, the Security Council created ONUCA, the U.N. Observer Group in Central America, the first ever U.N. peace-keeping operation in the Western Hemisphere.

1990. U.N. observers in Nicaragua. A parallel but separate operation, monitored a free and fair election. And also this year, after more than 20 years of persistent U.N. pressure and resolutions, Namibia finally gained its independence.

These successes have marked an upturn in the international role of the Secretary-General. They are part of the remarkable changes that have taken place in world politics in recent years. Does this mean that nations are increasingly relying on the United Nations -- and the office of the Secretary-General -- to settle international disputes peacefully?

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Picco, the Member States certainly do seem to be giving the Secretary-General a lot of tasks but there seems also to be a reluctance on their part to pay the bills, is this presenting problems for the Secretary-General's ability to do the things that are sought of him?

PICCO: Yes, it does present some problems. I think not only because the operations that have been mentioned here a few minutes ago do require a clear amount of money, without which the operation cannot be mounted and therefore the efforts of the United Nations as such cannot be concretized, but I think there is another aspect which pertains to the support and if you like, the financial end of political support, which is yet to be forthcoming if the Secretary-General is to pursue the role which is asked of him. I have in mind at this point the fact that the Secretary-General operates in the political arena without much structural support at the political level within this Organization. The Secretary-General does not have embassies around the world like governments, yet in the last few years he has been asked to perform in ways which are not too different from those of a government. I think ideas have been already floated with regard to how to improve his ability to work on this level and I think that these ideas, if concretized, of course would require further financial support and further political support.

LITTLEJOHNS: On that financial question Mr. Picco, we hear reports that the United Nations may be very much involved in the effort to restore peace in Cambodia and huge sums of money have been mentioned -- one and a half billion dollars perhaps even more -- how can the U.N., given its financial problems, undertake such an assignment?

READEX FICHE

PICCO; I think that the Cambodia operation, if it is to come about, will require a particular way of handling it from a financial point of view which until now has not happened. I wonder for instance, if one way of doing so would be to very clearly indicate that a particular amount of money has to be put up front before the operation starts. As you know, we do have in this particular case a fund which has been already set up and where a small amount of money has already been deposited, but I'm talking about a larger amount than that and I think ....

LITTLEJOHNS: Such as half a billion dollars?

PICCO: I will not venture into figures as this is not fully my field but it seems to me that the Cambodia operation may require a new approach even from a financial point of view.

LITTLEJOHNS: Hitherto, there's been no request by the Secretary-General to Member States to put money up front?

PICCO: If we're speaking of formal requests the answer is no.

LEWIS: It seems to me that history will give a very favourable verdict of the present Secretary-General because during his period of office we have seen a number of considerable successes for the U.N. but it's also true that we live in unusual times when nations are trying to get away from habits of confrontation and so on, so my question is how much has the Secretary-General been lucky in the period of history when he held this office or to what extent are the United Nations successes the result of his own personal diplomacy? Is it possible to distinguish between these two things?

PICCO: I don't think it's possible to distinguish but it is possible to analyze, in my view, some of these aspects. First comment I think goes back to the fact that the results we've obtained in the second part of the '80s with regard to the Secretary-General's role in world affairs find their roots in the first part of the '80s. By that I mean the following. We are of the opinion, at least in the office of the Secretary-General, that the international reality has begun to change when, to summarize it in one word, unilateralism if I may call it that way, has really come to a dead end. By that word I mean the ability of any individual major power to manage, control or resolve a crisis. That has happened I think pretty early in the decade. I do not want to cite the examples but I think they're very clear. From that moment on, what has happened is that we had a Security Council not very effective, and we had a Secretary-General who began to see whether the inability of the Council to work could be stimulated by a more active role for the Secretary-General. The positive result of this operation is that we discovered that contrary to political analysts, the power of the Security Council so to speak and of the Secretary-General, do not amount to a zero sum gain so it does not mean in fact more power in the hands of the Secretary-General, less in the Security Council or vice versa. In fact, what we have witnessed is that both have grown together. As with regard to luck I think that, of course, human events are part of a complex set of situations of which luck is a component, no question about it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Better to be born lucky than rich as they say.

PICCO: I think so.

GOODMAN: Mr. Picco, does the Secretary-General sometimes find that his efforts at quiet diplomacy are countered by the very public wrangling that goes in U.N. bodies -- I'm thinking particularly of the Assembly. One prime example perhaps of this was the question of Namibia where he and the Council were trying to do one thing and the Assembly was taking its own line in a sense and didn't make their task easy. I think this is replicated in other situations. Is this a common problem?

PICCO: I don't think it's a common problem. I think it is a fact of life that governments have their own agenda and their own interests and what we're doing here, we are trying to enlarge the commonality of interests between all of them. Now, it doesn't happen all the time for all of them and that is what leads sometimes some governments to prefer, for their own agenda and for their own national interests, to use a particular public position or public posture whereas we have others who would prefer a different approach, but this is due to the fact that we are only in the infancy of the attempt to join the national interests so to say in one common global interest.

GOODMAN: Perhaps if I could get down to specifics, recently the Foreign Minister of Pakistan asked the Security Council to become involved in the question of Kashmir which has bubbled up in recent months and has led to quite high casualties as you know, is there any likelihood that the Secretary-General himself might become involved in this issue which, after all, does have a long U.N. history in the early days of the Organization?

PICCO: Well, as you rightly say the U.N. is present in Kashmir, has been there in fact for four decades. As to what the future would reserve I think that a good rule of thumb in international relations is never say never.

PFAEFFLE: Mr. Picco, the main political purpose of the United Nations has been the maintenance of unilateral peace and security through international government, mainly by the big powers. Now this hasn't really happened after the War. The big powers, the two major powers have pretty much divided up the world among themselves and it has been a rather divisive world since. Now, since in the last few years we have seen detente in Europe, in the world, I'd like to ask you are we closer to fulfillment of the Charter now that the big powers are able to act in unison rather than in confrontation and which role could the Secretary-General play? Recently he went to Eastern Europe for instance.

PICCO: Yes. I think the most important, single element which would bring governments to work together and not in contradiction of each other is, and are, the global issues. This is like environment, this is like drugs, this is like contagious diseases and I think these issues by their very nature are such that they would encourage governments to work together and not at cross purposes. With regard to our role in these issues I think it is evident that the '90s will be the decade of global issues for the United Nations. As for the role of the Secretary-General, I think what we have is advantage over governments and of course many disadvantages, but the advantage is that we do not have, as somebody said, a particular number of divisions, we don't have commercial trade with any governments, we don't have this kind of linkages and therefore we can take positions which do not belie a vested interested of others unless written in the Charter.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE.** Our guest is Giandomenico Picco, Director and Assistant to the Secretary-General for Special Assignments.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Picco, you've mentioned that the United Nations doesn't have divisions. The former Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim now the President of Austria, once said that all that the Secretary-General had going for him was moral authority, do you feel that perhaps with the changed international situation the current Secretary-General, Perez de Cuellar, has something more going for him?

PICCO: I think the position of the Secretary-General is more than just that. I would like to recall here a small anecdote which I will not locate in place but probably in time and that is something which happened in 1985 to this present Secretary-General. When he entered the room of a leader of a country at war this leader said to him, "Secretary- General I receive in this office many potential mediators for the war with my neighbour and these mediators come from different countries and as they walk from the door to my desk -- it was a big office I'd like to add -- I think immediately that all kinds of relations that my country has with the government from where the mediator comes from, be it military, be it trade, financial or otherwise, and I do so because I want to find out how I can influence the potential mediator in my favour but as my calculation comes to my end, of course I have to think that my enemy will do exactly the same and therefore I disqualify that particular mediator. When you came into this office Mr. Secretary-General, I in vain tried to find out what kind of relations I've got with you and I found none and it is because of this reason that I think you will help us put an end to this war."

LITTLEJOHNS: Very good.

LEWIS: I wonder if you can tell us to what extent the Secretary-General feels that his influence depends on having the support and very close relations with the five permanent members of the Security Council, the five big powers, and to what extent does he feel that he can acquire influence and be effective operating absolutely individually by himself without any links to other countries?

PICCO: Well, I will give you two comments to this question. The first is I don't think that even major countries can operate individually today, 1990, in any particular context but having said that there are different realities. There are realities, I would say regional realities, where the role of the major powers is important but not so important and there are other regional realities where their role is particularly important and I think we have to make here quite a clear division. I think we are lucky to live I think in a reality now, in a world where not necessarily the major powers have to decide how things are going and they don't, therefore the position of the Secretary-General with regard to the relations he has with them I think is dictated by a particular reality that we're talking about and they are very different.

LEWIS: I wonder if you think that there isn't more of a role these days for preventative diplomacy by the Secretary-General, that's to say trying to stop disputes before they happen rather than trying to make peace after a war has begun?

PICCO: Yes, I think you're right. I think this is a role that the U.N. has not yet fully exploited and the reason being, among many others, the one I mentioned to Mike at the beginning of this discussion, namely the Secretary-General is quite inhibited in his actions to exercise preventative

diplomacy by the means at his disposal and I think that this is exactly the area where we will have to work to improve the ability of the United Nations in the next decade. Yes, I agree with you that is the other big role for the U.N. in the '90s.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Picco, the U.N. does have a chain of Information Centres, don't the Directors of the Information Centres report to the Secretary-General on developments in their areas?

PICCO: Yes, they do. Let me give you another example which probably underlines better what I'm trying to explain as a conception. The United Nations is present in every single country, from Pakistan to Cyprus, in that particular geographic area which one can call Middle East generally. We do not have in any of these countries, though we do have many United Nations officials present, we do not have a political office of the Secretary-General which would do some thinking for him at the regional level.

GOODMAN: It seems that much of the Secretary-General's time is taken not so much in trying to bring two parties together at the negotiating table but to get them actually to come together in the first place. I know you have been involved in this personally in the case particularly of Iran and Iraq -- it's over a year now since their Foreign Ministers last met -- is there some formula which the U.N. relies on to try and bring parties together before they even start bargaining?

PICCO: I'm trying to see if I understand exactly what you mean.

GOODMAN: There must be some sort of book somewhere which tells you what to do, how to bring these parties into the same room at the same time? We've had a lot of time spent trying just to get parties to a dispute into the same room at the same time even if they come in through separate doors -- this once happened in a very well-known choreographed incident -- is there some rule, some book which tells you how this happens, how to bring parties together, what you do to get to get them together?

PICCO: Well, I think the basic book which we use when we try to do that are really the books of history. Without a very detailed knowledge of the history of whom we're dealing with I don't think there is any beginning and I think history comes first and foremost at the beginning of our exercise but I think what we have done over the last ten years, if I just look at the last ten years, is that we have had different approaches with regard to different cases. In the case of Cyprus as you know the formula for bringing them together was a particular one, in the case of Afghanistan it was a different one and in the case of Iran/Iraq it was yet another one so it is not the formula which I think needs to be put down in a book insofar as the formula is simply a reaction to the contingent situation. What should be put down into a book is really the rules by which an intermediary first and foremost, but possibly also the parties, do not assume ever that they are always and constantly in the right.

PFAEFFLE: Mr. Picco, I'd also like to pick up on your anecdote again from before. These sweeping changes in Europe, the rapprochement between the big powers, have not really made much difference in the Middle East. Now, you've been involved in the Iran/Iraq efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the conflict, do you see any continuous role of the Secretary-

General to settle this conflict? Recently there have been rumours that one side would like to settle the conflict without the Secretary-General's participation.

PICCO: I think with regard to the Middle East and by that I assume you refer to the Arab/Israeli conflict, I think we have to be very honest with ourselves here at the United Nations. With the exclusion of the role performed in 1949 by Ralph Bunche, the role of the United Nations with regard to the Middle East, and I'm talking about the Secretariat, has basically been a role which had to do with peace-keeping, not with peace-making. Now, the reasons for this basically can be summarized in one reason, that one party has found itself uneasy to provide that role to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. That is the truth. Whether this will change or not I do not know but I think that the reality at the moment is that the Secretariat and the Secretary-General have been so to say portrayed through the decisions taken by the Security Council and the General Assembly. One party feels that those decisions were unfavourable to it and it has enlarged that position to the figure of the Secretary-General. As a consequence the Secretary-General, until this day, I don't think has really had a peace-making role in the Middle East. Now, as I said, everything is moving in the world so I repeat never say never in politics.

LEWIS: Going back to preventative diplomacy and ways of building up the office of the Secretary-General as a mediator, would it be helpful if you gave the Secretary-General a large fund of money? For instance Prof. Thomas Frank of New York University has suggested a figure of $40 million that would be a fund for personal mediation and information gathering and all those embassy functions that you said you lack. Secondly, Prof. Frank suggested that to make the Secretary-General more

impartial he should be limited to only one longer term of office so that he is never running for re-election. So do you think developments of that kind would make him a more effective mediator?

PICCO: I indeed share personally the view of a one-term Secretary-General.

LITTLEJOHNS: Does that mean that the Secretary-General should have longer than a five-year term? Is that what you mean?

PICCO: It is I think a reasonable suggestion.

LEWIS: Seven or eight years perhaps?

PICCO: The alternative suggestion is a situation we have had with the present Secretary-General where he did not run in any case, neither for a third or for a second mandate or whatever so that would technically be a substitute to the formulation of a one-term Secretary-General.

LITTLEJOHNS: His term expires at the end of '91...

PICCO: That is correct.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you think that he will be available for a third term?

PICCO: He will not run for a third term.

LITTLEJOHNS: Definitely not?

PICCO: I don't think he will run for a third term.

LITTLEJOHNS; When you say he won't run I mean will he be available?

PICCO: I think that is a question you should ask to him.

GOODMAN: Back to specifics if we might, could you perhaps give us some historical perspective on the main problems that are now preoccupying the Secretary-General, where he's probing and where you think progress is most likely to come in the nearest future?

PICCO: We are working very, very hard to assist the end of the war in Afghanistan. We hope that the particular crisis which has made the Afghan people suffer for so long will come to an end. The work in this regard is being conducted mainly outside the limelight but it is a very intensive work by the Secretary-General, of course together with the guarantor powers of the Geneva agreements. I think there is hope there. I think there is a movement in the immediate future we'll say, with regard to Western Sahara. Some movement in that front will happen, whether it will be transformed into an end of the situation and difficulties I do not know yet.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Picco, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Our guest has been Giandomenico Picco, Director and Assistant to the Secretary-General for Special Assignments. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Paul Lewis of The New York Times; Anthony Goodman of Reuters; and Walter Pfaeffle of the Kuwait News Agency.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

****

Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: **WORLD CHRONICLE,** United Nations, Room S-837, New York, New York 10017, USA.

WORLD CHRONICLE is broadcast worldwide and features guests whose work is concerned with major global issues. This programme is a public affairs presentation of this station from United Nations Radio and Television.

Additional informational material about the United Nations can be obtained by writing to the Public Inquiries Unit, United Nations, Room GA-57, New York, New York, 10017, USA or the UN Information Centre in your country.

17